

Pastor's Message

The liturgy of the Eucharist is modeled on the Last Supper of the Lord. We celebrate the Mass because at that last supper with his disciples, Jesus, after taking the bread, blessing and breaking it said: "*This is my body which will be given for you: do this in memory of me.*" And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you*" Lk. 22: 19-20. We celebrate the Mass because Jesus told us to do so until he comes again.

The liturgy of the Eucharist consists of three parts: 1. the preparation of the gifts; 2. the Eucharistic prayer; and 3. communion. In the earliest days of our church people would gather in homes often of the widows (they had the room and the gift of hospitality). They would bring food and gifts for the host. They would then eat what they had brought (Paul has much to say about this in his letter to the Corinthian community: see I Cor. 11: 17-33) and after eating would break the bread and share the final cup of wine recalling that the risen Christ has promised to be and is still with us. These days as we gather in churches rather than in homes it is easier to bring money to support the community than to bring chickens, or pies, or bottles of wine, or a covered dish. The collection is our way of bringing a gift to the community to share in our collective family gathering.

The liturgy of the Second Vatican Council re-instituted the ancient rite of actually bringing the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. This symbolic gesture reminds us all that we bring our gifts to God, not only bread and wine but most especially our lives. St. Augustine reminded his community to see themselves in the bread brought to the altar, see yourself in the cup. The gifts we bring are symbols of our lives. St. Paul invites us to see ourselves as the Body of Christ. In the Eucharist Jesus is made real and present to us so that we can see who we really are, brothers and sisters of Christ and co-heirs with him to eternal life. This great mystery of the Eucharist is the center of our faith. As the document on the liturgy from the Council says: The Eucharist "is the source and summit of the Christian life". The Mass is the celebration to which we bring the events of the previous week to God and from which we begin the new week. Therefore weekly participation in the Mass is essential to the Catholic Christian life.

In the early church real bread was brought and used in the celebration. Unleavened (flat) bread was not used until the 9th century and the little round hosts were not used until the 11th. In fact the Ordo which is the book that describes how best to celebrate the Mass says: "the nature of the sign demands that the material for the eucharistic celebration appear as actual food." When second graders come to communion for their first time, I think it is often harder for them to believe that what they are receiving is bread than that the wafer is the Body of Christ. Bread should look like bread, wine should taste like wine. They will become the body and blood of Christ in our celebration.

Next week we will look at the ancient, Jewish prayer that is prayed over our gifts.

Fr. Chris